

The Neo-Victorian Gentleman

...because technology moves forward while civilisation goes in circles.

The man who ate a mammoth



(<https://theoriginalrowanmccabe.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/the-man-who-ate-a-mammoth2.jpg>)

(<https://theoriginalrowanmccabe.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/hunting-mammoth.gif>)

Gerald Saachs entered the compound with a jaunty spring in his step. Today was the day he crossed something off that most universal of lists, often entitled 'things to do before I die'. It was 6:45 local time, his pinstripe trousers were freshly pressed and his Italian loafers neatly polished. The sub zero temperatures had proved quite a wardrobe disaster, but he had managed to pick up a rather swanky Inuit fur coat which suited the climate. Unfortunately, he was still forced to wear a hideous pair of snow goggles when he was outdoors. For this reason, he was particularly glad to have passed by the armed guards and into the waiting room.

He was accompanied by a guide who worked in the Siberian governments historical protection programme. As he had explained to Gerald on the aeroplane, his job was to accompany him from London Heathrow to a secured outpost in northern Siberia, to escort him to the storage complex and to make sure he kept well within the strict laws around protecting items of historical importance. The plane journey had been long and Gerald had found it especially tedious. His guide, who referred to himself only as Mr. Lattimer, had the conversational skills of a particularly dim ape. Inside the cabin of his private jet, Gerald had eventually given up on trying to learn

anything about him and had, instead, taken to drinking glass after glass of fine cognac and smoking heavily in silence. He had time to fit in a few hours sleep before he was awoken rather roughly by Mr Lattimer when they landed.

The waiting room was largely empty. Directly in front, a burly looking metal detector and two armed guards blocked the way to an adjoining hallway. To his left was a long grey desk and Gerald gave a nod of recognition to a security guard behind it. They were expecting his arrival. The guard gestured towards the bottle of vintage burgundy he was holding in his left hand, while muttering something in what sounded like Russian. It became clear that this would have to be checked before he could pass through and, as he waited in a nearby seating area, he began to ponder once more on the nature of his pilgrimage. This would be the single most expensive meal he had ever paid for. The mammoth steak itself costing £50,000. Along with travel expenses, admin charges and his change of wardrobe he was set to pay out about £72,054.02. This is what his accountant had told him the previous Monday. Hearing about the venture through word of mouth he had invited Gerald to his office for an 'essential chat', during which he had referred to the whole affair as 'financial suicide'. But his accountant hadn't the slightest understanding of his motives. How could he? He spent all his time managing finance and was therefore ignorant to the idea that some things are worth much more than money. As any man of culture knows, the ability to hold good accounts goes hand in hand with a lack of imagination.

He remembered the first time he had considered this most unlikely meal. He was about twelve years old and had been taken on a school trip to the Natural History Museum. Among all the dinosaur bones and fragments of neolithic tools, something had stuck him in a way that nothing else ever would. On one of the walls, beside a glass box containing some samples of nomad clothing, was a rather modest sketch of a mammoth surrounded by three pre-historic men. Standing on the barren icy plain, they were wearing nothing but animal furs and, armed with spears, were about to attack this enormous monster head on. Underneath had been a few paragraphs explaining the mammoths importance in sustaining those early ancestors. It was large enough to feed a significant group of people for many weeks. Furthermore, as a creature which was struggling to adjust to the changing climates at the time, it was ripe for the picking. Gerald could still remember the way this had stuck him all those years ago. Before the human race even had a chance to develop it could have been nipped in the bud by a lack of food and the harsh weather of the ice age. This creature was a major benefactor to our later success; it had effectively fed the sparks which started the flame. How thrilling it would be, he thought, to taste the very elixir of life.

However, this fantasy had not been an obsession. Gerald had let it rest in the back of his mind for the best part of his life. Now at thirty-three, he had sampled many rare and wonderful creatures that were not extinct. He was a strong believer in the idea, supported by that famous espouser of evolution Mr. Charles Darwin, that the only way to truly get to know an animal is to eat it. He had tasted great white shark, African giraffe, ostrich, kangaroo and a whole range of other fanciful poultries, meats and fishes. But when he heard news of a perfectly preserved woolly mammoth being excavated from deep inside the icy plains of Siberia, he couldn't resist the urge to e-mail the government body in charge of the research.

He was surprised by their response, which outlined a few fundamental limiting factors, but essentially agreed to the offer. There were some ground rules which a representative laid down in clear, formal English. Under no circumstances was the mammoth to be taken out of the Siberian research complex. There was to be a six month waiting period, as the scientists needed to run certain tests first and gain the majority of measurements, photographs and samples they required.

Lastly, he would be limited to the amount of 6 ounces of flesh, to do with what he may. The price would be an non-negotiable £50,000 and would, from this point forward, be referred to as a donation to their research. Gerald could hardly believe his luck and his response was brief. *I have no desire to take the mammoth from the complex, but would it be possible to dine by its side?*

The security guard came over to the seats where Gerald and Mr. Lattimer had been waiting, he muttered something and then passed the opened bottle back to Gerald. He took this to be a sign that everything was all right. The guard led him and his guide over to the metal detectors and, after passing through, they continued down a perfectly white corridor, covered with a laminate flooring. The whole building had no windows at all and was lit entirely by florescent lights from above. At the end of the hallway was the lift which led to the storage basement. As he pressed the button, Gerald noticed his hands were shaking. It wouldn't be long now. He had been assured on the phone that his specific requirements would be met. The meat would be defrosted, then cooked medium rare by a chef who had experience in preparing elephant. It was to be served with a white wine jut and a side of rocket salad with a chilli-infused dressing. The temperature in the storage room was well below zero but the meal would be timed to coincide with Gerald's arrival.

They had stepped into the lift and were now heading down steadily. In the glass mirror on the wall, Gerald caught sight of his bright cobalt eyes. These were not the eyes of a monster, he thought, though he knew that if he had talked to anyone about his mission they would have assured him that they where. But the mammoth was already dead, after all. The scientists had gotten all of the materials they needed for their research. What difference would the loss of a 6 oz chunk make? Nothing, nothing at all. Besides, scientists in China had recently claimed they would be able to clone a mammoth in under five years anyway, so the world could soon have all the live examples it desired, although this had opened a messy debate about man playing god or some such nonsense. Gerald was not a spiritual man in any sense of the word. In the past people had called him an agnostic but the truth was that trying to prove the unprovable simply bored him. Call that what you will, he thought.

The lift hit the basement floor with a dull thud, and a binging sound signalled the opening of the doors. It was a huge, mainly empty, square room and the floor was covered with crushed ice. As he stood out, he heard the echo on the walls as his loafers crunched in the artificial snow. Everything was exactly as he had asked for. The entire room was lit by candlelight. On the right hand side of the room, near the lift's doors, was a small table for one. It was covered with a white silk tablecloth and there was a dark red candlestick in the centre, burning in a green wine bottle.

There was a waiter present, dressed in a black bow tie, who spoke fluent English and introduced himself immediately. "Good evening sir, my name is Sergo," he said in a jolly tone, "I will be your waiter for this evening. I trust you've had a safe journey". Gerald could hardly resist the urge to break out of this banal civility at once. "What do you think about this? About what I'm doing here?", he thought, "if I paid you enough would you kill for me?". But he didn't, he only smiled and nodded politely.

"Would you like to see the specimen first?" Sergo asked, as if he was referring to a leaf sample. In the back corner of the room, to the left of the lifts doors, was a perfectly preserved woolly mammoth and the three men now crunched across the ice towards it. It was a strange sight to behold. The millennia of time it had spent underneath the ground had contorted, distorted its body. It now rested uncomfortably on its back, on top of an oversized body bag, with its legs pointed up in the air at the wrong angles. Nevertheless, it was a fine specimen and he felt a shudder of delight run up his spine as he stroked the creatures hair. He looked into its eyes. They

were real, almost realer than real, and in the darks of its pupils he was sure he could sense a look of malevolence. He thought again about the experiences of those archetypal humans. To them this creature was a monster, a titan from before time, and to destroy it was all that they knew.

After a few minutes in silence the waiter asked Gerald if he was ready for his meal and he walked back towards the table and sat down. Yes, it was exactly how he had imagined it. This was to be a tribute, an elegy for his ancestors and a celebration in honour of humanity. The fine clothes, wine and china were essential. He did not want to pretend to be a savage. No, this was not role play. He wanted to raise glass to his ancient ancestors while acknowledging his species' enlightenment over time; he relished in the anachronism of such an ancient choice of food being served on something so refined as a china plate.

The waiter was now back with his meal, ferried from an adjoining room inside of a sterling silver tray with lid. It was below freezing so Gerald did not remove his jacket. However, despite the temperature he was assured that the meat would stay hot enough, provided that he ate at a reasonable pace. Sat beside this monster underground in the flicker of the candle flame, he suddenly felt as if he had been removed from the workings of time itself. It was as if he was suspended in a vacuum, over which the laws of physics had lost their control. Sergio placed the plate neatly on the table as Gerald unfolded his napkin. As he looked up at him, he thought he saw the first glint of confusion in the waiter's eyes. This would most probably be the strangest shift he ever worked. He would tell his grandchildren about it. It would come back to him in his nightmares.

Gerald picked up his steak knife and bit into the first carefully dissected chunk. It was rich, uncannily rich. The meat was more like Kobe beef than any elephant he had ever tasted. Though tough at first, it melted in his mouth like butter, flaking apart in long thick strings. Gerald knew that the mammoths' blood was especially adapted to its climate; the haemoglobin could carry oxygen at much lower temperatures than any animal alive today. At this moment, he decided that the rich texture was created to some degree by this same property.

Mr. Lattimer was sat on a chair next to the lift about five metres away from Gerald. Breaking the silence, he chimed in with the first words he had spoken in over 8 hours. His voice was deep and gritty, as if he had went a very long time without water. "The scientists doing the work here have come to some interesting conclusions," he said slowly. Turning to his left, Gerald made a humming sound of feigned interest as he chewed. "You see, this mammoth did not die of natural causes," he explained with a melancholy tone, "its brain and heart have been removed by what looks like a sharpened tool".

"So it was our early ancestors who killed it?" Gerald replied, with a mouth full of pre-history.

"It has solidified something historians have suspected for some time. The mammoths were not wiped out by climate change, or even by the need for food." Here Mr. Lattimer paused as if considering something deeply. "They were hunted to extinction for fun and glory," he said eventually, "it was our own greed and callousness which wiped out this beast".

"Interesting" Gerald replied but, in truth, he was hardly listening. He had realised that the most expensive meal he ever bought was now beginning to go cold and he decided that the only way to get through it in time would be to eat it at pace.

Two and a half minutes later, as he swallowed a particularly large chunk too quickly, he felt it

lodge in his throat and completely cut off his air supply. At first it seemed to Gerald almost like slapstick. The unlikeness of the whole situation meant that coming to harm by eating at a rushed pace seemed near impossible. For this reason, he decided not to inform anyone and spent a leisurely minute or so trying to swallow the chunk down. But what initially seemed to not be a problem soon amounted to the fact that Gerald was choking ever so slightly on his beloved mammoth. He could not cough it out, as it was lodged firm and for this reason he began to panic.

The rate of Gerald's heartbeat slowed again, however, as he suddenly realised he would be able to wash the perpetrating flesh away. But as he reached for his burgundy and tipped the bottle, it was as if gravity had lost all its sway. He looked closer, the wine was frozen solid and he heard the glass crack as it fell from his hands on to the floor. The sound seemed to echo more than he expected it to, as if three or four bottles had fallen one after the other.

Gerald was faced with the enormity of the situation now in all its hyperbole. He was choking and he desperately needed some help. His first instinct was to scream but he was unable to make a sound. All he really needed was a sharp blow to the back, but as he looked around the dimly lit room it seemed that Sergo had disappeared next door. However, to his left he could still see Mr. Lattimer as he sat watching the mammoth intently. Strangely though, he could not get his attention, even as he punched his fists into the table like a lunatic. It was as if he was ignoring him, although Gerald couldn't understand why.

He was panicking again now and had gone at least three minutes without air. There was nothing for it, he needed to get over to Mr. Lattimer and shake him until he understood what was happening. He tried to stand up but was beginning to feel extremely light headed. None of this felt real, yet, as in a nightmare when you continue to struggle in the face of surrealism, he felt compelled to fight for his own survival. Eventually, amid gagging in silence, he wobbled to his feet. He could only scream inside of his head as he choked.

The last thing he could recall was landing on his side in the ice. As he looked over at the huge bundle of fur across the room, he began to feel a warm sensation running through his fingers and into his whole body. "What a marvellous way to die," he thought, as he closed his eyes.

6 thoughts on "The man who ate a mammoth"

Jeb says:

30/06/2016 at 05:46

That was a pleasant read. Very inventive, I must say. And I just wanted to know if you could eat frozen prehistoric mammoth. I never thought that I would stumble upon a piece of well written fiction with a tinge of dark humor. Strange place, the internet, strange place...

Reply

Rowan The Poet says:

30/06/2016 at 09:00

Thanks Jeb! I wrote that a few years ago now and it's quite different to the kind of stuff I write now, so to hear that you've enjoyed it means the world to me. Interesting to know people are looking for frozen mammoth stakes as well ha ha.

Reply**leosha sanders** says:07/02/2018 at 05:45

My friend, growing up in Siberia I use to hunt with my uncles for Mastadon bones to sell to the black market during the summers. Long days and being wet jetting water into the ice banks searching for the beasts became a consuming event for all the boys in my village and in my family. A handfull of bones could equal a year of wage of my father. We were proud to find the bones. When we found one with meat and hair still attached and the meat was not rotten, we would feast on it since we were barely eating during the work to extract the animal from the ice. I am surprised that your description of what it tastes like is accurate. It is rich, melts in your mouth and now that I live in the USA I have enjoy the best meat the world can offer. Nothing can compare to a salted piece of mastadon cooked over a fire or fried in butter and vodka. How interesting that only the poorest people in Siberia and the wealthiest on earth would have this experience. Also, mastadon marrow soup made from bones too damaged to sell is amazing also. Russians waste nothing.

Rowan The Poet says:10/02/2018 at 17:59

Hi Leosha,

This story is incredible. Would you mind sending me an e-mail? I'd love to talk to you about it more: rowanmccabe6@hotmail.co.uk

walter sikora says:18/03/2017 at 01:25

Excellent story. It took a while to realize it is fiction.

Reply**Jack Hallahan** says:05/05/2017 at 23:02

You know I came here looking for a real mammoth eating account. Instead I found something better. It would be absolutely amazing if poor Gerald somehow got resuscitated by Mr. Lattimer just so we could see him go feed his ego again.

Reply

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